

Revelations of an Ex-Speaker

BY AN EX-SPEAKER OF A STATE LEGISLATURE.

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Up-to-date Legislatures have abandoned the old-fashioned methods of making easy money. The law-builders who are so modern that they belong to the "up-to-the-minute" class, and who get themselves elected to serve the people in general assembly, with their own definition of the word "serve," do not boodle, if they boodle at all, in the clumsy, hand-up style of some years ago.

The modernizing of the great game of graft has really been of public benefit, for there is not so much bribery in State Legislatures as there was less than ten years ago. The old-time methods of sandbagging have given way to the new method of protection; the former "rough work" has been displaced by smooth practices. It is no longer possible to have a legislature boobyed by its young record, for some of the most finished rascals who ever went to a State capital to make laws and money have unimpeachable records in the balance line.

Team work has taken the place of individual efforts; the syndicate has pushed out the single man. The new way of "doing" business in State Legislatures is to prevent sandbagging bills from getting past committees; the corporations are unprotected these days, not menaced.

In former days, when the "boys" were in need of ready money, it was the practice to introduce several bills which would have the effect of bringing to the State-house the legislative agents of the threatened interests. The agents would then give up more or less handsomely, and the "boys," their fortunes repaired, would have their corporate "yes" done for a time. Boobie bills then were the rule, today they are the exception.

Long before a Legislature convenes the syndicate, composed of holdover Senators and Representatives-elect, gets together and its members lay out their campaign. When the Legislature meets certain interests have been selected which the syndicate has agreed to protect; that is to keep out of the hands of the sandbaggers and petty grafters. For this service the interests in question promise to pay to the members of the syndicate certain sums of money. This arrangement is something like the contracts which Chinese doctors make with their patients; so long as the doctor keeps the patient well he is paid, when the patient falls sick the payment stops.

Some of the "boys," however, whose perquisites were curtailed by the operations of the syndicate, look another view of the situation. One of them put it this way:

"The protective committee are hogs. They have all the graft, and none of us can even get a look-in. They have killed the game for every one but themselves, and it will not be long before they kill the game for themselves."

If I were asked: "What is the root of the boobie bill in the Legislature?" I should reply: "The self-interest of prominent men and the civic indifference of the respectable citizen."

Boobie is a two-handed game, and more often than is suspected the first lead is made by men who stand at the head of financial, commercial or manufacturing affairs. Such men want special privileges. They must go to the Legislature for them. Special privileges, without adequate compensation to the public, are wrong. The

will, for a consideration, stand between you and the petty grafter. We will guard against harm when such harm is threatened by men who seek to injure you for corrupt purposes. But we will not protect you when the real interests of the people are involved. When honest bills, whose effect is prejudicial to your interests, are introduced, you must look out for yourselves."

Corporations, who long have been regarded as "meat" by dishonest members of a Legislature, do not fear honest efforts to control or limit them, but they dread the bleeding by booblers and grafters. So when the syndicate comes forward with its proposition to keep off the leeches, the corporations gladly accept, pay out a lump sum, charge it to legal fees or incidental expenses and figure they are ahead of the game.

In order to make good its pledges the syndicate must have undisputed control of at least one branch of the Legislature. It is not necessary to have the Speaker of the House or the Governor of the State in harmony with the syndicate, for its work is to prevent, not forward, legislation. The syndicate works on the principle of negation, that means no bills passed.

When I was Speaker a syndicate such as I have described, prevented every bill of a hold-up or sandbagging nature from getting past the doors of the legislative rooms. Yet the very leaders of that syndicate were the leaders in forwarding public service bills which were opposed, in every particular, to the selfish interests of its clients. And the record of that general efficiency marked it as one of the most efficient for real public good ever held in the State.

The question arises: Are such methods as the syndicate employs boobying? To boobie or graft is to take money for votes. The syndicate takes money to be longed to a syndicate Senator who and his associates must not, should not and could not be classed with booblers. He said:

"We are reformers; we have cleaned out the Senate. There are no grafters on our side of the fence. By preventing graft we have killed the game. Since we have boobyed the job there hasn't been a boobie bill got out of committee; there hasn't been a sandbagging resolution which got past its introduction stage."

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big business men figure that it is cheaper to pay money for votes than to pay money into the public treasury for the special privilege. They have that thought when they go to the State capital with their bills, and they begin to buy votes at once.

Such men are of the bi-standard kind; they have one rule for their private and another for their public business. They would not cheat a customer, steal a penny or break a contract. Yet they will deliberately go out to buy votes, and make such purchases in a methodical, business-like way. In short, they look upon every man who has a seat in a State Legislature, City Council or county board as a purchasable commodity, and their consciences are so well trained that they never whisper when they commit the crime of bribery.

Such conditions could not last long if the so-called respectable citizen would shake off his civic indifference for two elections, the second immediately following the first. Any time the highly respectable citizen gets busy, and gets busy the right way, the briber and his tool in the Legislature are in trouble. But the dishonest lawmakers have no real fear of a general awakening. They know that the special called public indignation seldom lasts over night, for the public is a lazy animal when it comes to exercising its civic duties. So when the agitation arrives, the boobler simply lies low, waits for the storm to blow over, then speaks out of his cyclone cellar and starts in to make up for lost time.

I have attempted, in this series of papers, to show how partisan politics, factional strife, local conditions, sectional jealousies and personal ambitions moved as factors in the great problem of legislation, but the most powerful of all factors for evil is the supreme selfishness and utter lack of patriotism of men listed as "prominent citizens." Such men stand ready to send members of Legislatures to perdition so they can get from the State some things they have no right to.

Up to date, reform organizations, voters' leagues, citizens' committees and like bodies have directed their efforts to reforming Legislatures. They are working on wrong lines. They should begin their work for the uplifting of public morals by reforming the men who head our great industrial and commercial institutions, and the best way to reform some is to send them to the penitentiary. When laws are passed which will punish the vote-buyer twice as severely as the vote-seller and which will permit any vote-seller to go free who will testify against a vote-buyer, you will find boobling becoming a mighty unpopular game in General Assemblies.

I shall never forget the confession made to me by a fellow-member who had gone the downward road. He lived in a county adjoining mine. He was looked upon as an exemplary citizen. Never a word of scandal was connected with him, yet he, in time, became a self-confessed boobler. We were riding a country road together, when he told me how he fell from honesty. He said:

"I was asked the other day to sound you. They want to get you in the game, and I promised to help them get your vote. I got it for them. I got it for them. Do you know who it is asked me to talk to you?"

He then gave me the name of one of the best-known lawyers in the principal city in my State, a man who had been honored

by elevation to the bench. Continuing, my friend said:

"It is that same d-d rascal who got me first. I had no intention of getting wrong when I went to the Legislature. I had enough money of my own, and did not care for more. But soon after the House met I fell in with some fellows, and we had some good times, and good times cost money. I found that I was spending more than I should, but when I began to cut down expenses this lawyer came to me with a proposition. He said: 'I want a good reliable man in the House simply to watch things and report to him when certain bills come up. He offered me the place, and with it a good salary. He said he did not care how I voted; he did not want my vote, but my information. So I said all right, and for a month did nothing but cash the checks he sent me, for there was nothing doing in his line.'

"One day a bill came up for nasars, and my boss appeared on the scene. He sent for me and I went to his room and he told me he needed my help and my vote to pass that bill. So I said all right, and went out and hustled, and we put the bill through. The next day some of the fellows came to me and said the lawyer had told them I would fix it up with them, and while they were in my room another fellow came in with a package. I opened it and found it was a package of currency and there I was caught, with the goods on me."

"Now, what could I do or say? Those fellows knew I had been running errands for the lawyer. He had told them I was his agent, and just at the right time he sends the money. Well, I asked each one how much he was to get and paid him

then and there. It was the rawest thing I ever saw, but no one ever peeped, and when I had paid up all I found there was \$500 left. I telegraphed the lawyer: 'What shall I do with the balance?' and he wired back: 'Keep it yourself.' So I kept it, and after that it was easy money all the time."

And that is the simple, true story of how a decent, although weak, man was trapped and made a boobler, and the man who wrought the curse today stands well up in the head of his profession.

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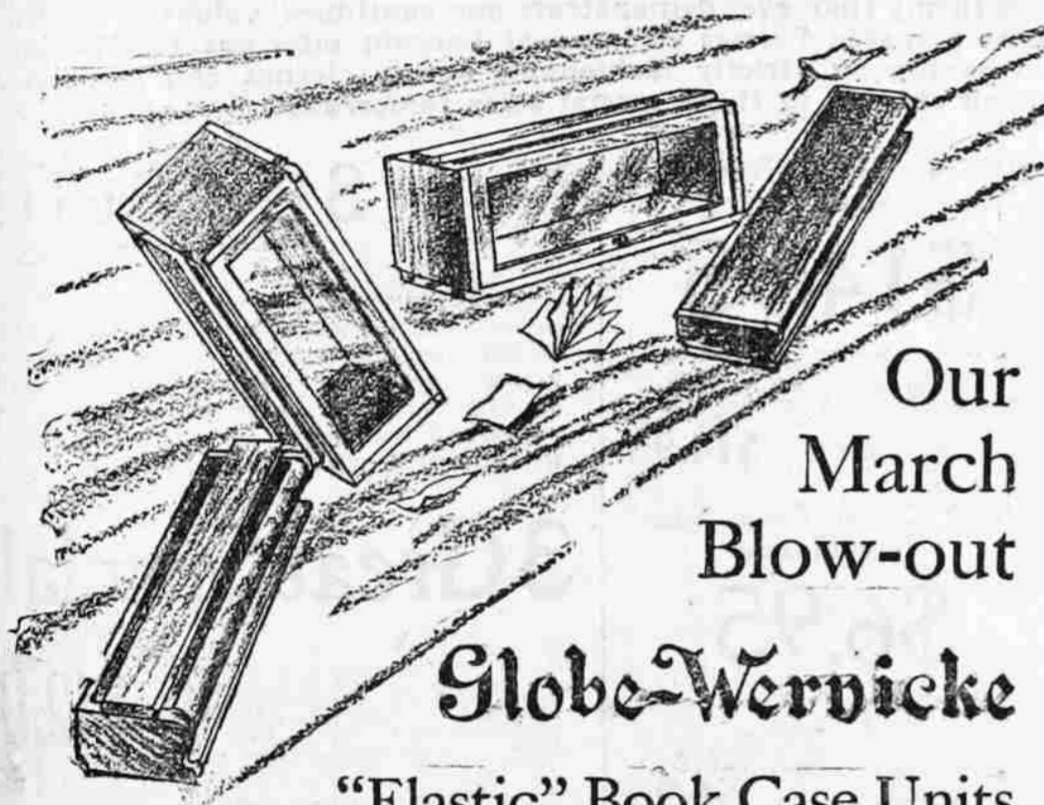
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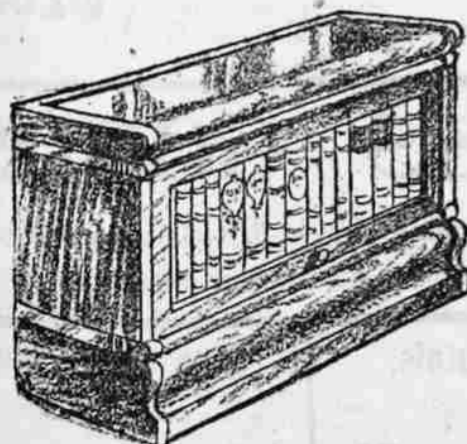
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